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ABSTRACT

The Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) attempts to advance the understanding of educational quality by research and development on the design, implementation, analysis, and use of assessment information. CRESST's research programs are directed at five major goals: (1) provide leadership to improve assessment policy and practice at the national, state, and local levels; (2) improve the quality, sensitivity, and fairness of student performance assessments; (3) improve the validity of models and indicators for judging the quality of schools; (4) improve understanding of assessment development, implementation, and effects as they occur in school practice; and (5) improve understanding of assessment policy and its contribution to educational improvement. An expanded set of criteria are being developed and refined for judging the validity of educational assessment. Research currently focuses on the following programs: (1) Program 1, building the infrastructure for improved assessment; (2) Program 2, designs for learning-based assessment (prototypes and models); and (3) Program 3, collaborative development and improvement of assessments in practice. The CRESST team is composed of researchers from the: (1) Center for Study of Evaluation at the University of California (Los Angeles); (2) University of Colorado; (3) RAND Corporation; (4) University of Chicago (Illinois); (5) University of California (Santa Barbara); and (6) University of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania). (SLD)

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THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON EVALUATION, STANDARDS, AND STUDENT TESTING (CRESST)

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The Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST)

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How do we judge the quality of education? How do we determine what our students know and what they can do? What information should teachers, administrators, and policymakers have to make improvements in our educational system? How can we improve the kinds of measures we use so that assessment contributes to the well-being of individuals and organizations?

The mission of the new, OERI-supported Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) focuses on these essential questions, seeking to advance understanding of educational quality through research and development on the design, implementation, analysis, and use of assessment information.

After describing CRESST's R&D goals and underlying principles, this Digest outlines three major programs of the Center.

- Building the infrastructure for improved assessment
- Designing improved learning based assessments
- Collaborating to develop and improve assessments in practice

Research and Development Goals

Recognizing the shortcomings of traditional testing methods and realizing the need to achieve national educational goals, CRESST's research programs are directed at five major goals:

1. Provide leadership to improve assessment policy and practice at the national, state, and local levels.

This objective includes: national agenda setting, establishing mechanisms for the exchange of state-of-the-art assessment research and products, reinforcing a national infrastructure supporting assessment change, scrutiny of existing practices, and communicating with the broad array of policy and practitioner constituencies interested in improved educational practice. Program One is devoted to reaching this goal.

2. Improve the quality, sensitivity, and fairness of student performance assessments.

This objective, conducted principally in Program Two, includes synthesis of state-of-the-art alternatives, development of new prototype assessments measuring national educational goals, and strengthening the underlying design and validation theory of new and existing assessment alternatives.

3. Improve the validity of models and indicators for judging the quality of schools.

Work on this objective, conducted in Programs Two and Three, includes synthesis of existing alternatives, development of new models linking the results of measures, and equitably assessing the progress and quality of schools.

4.Improve understanding of assessment development, implementation, and effects as they occur in school practice.

This objective, conducted principally in Program Three, includes: analyses of alternative models for implementing new assessment approaches at the state, local, and classroom levels; clarification of potential impediments and facilitators in implementing new approaches; and scrutiny of actual effects of new and existing alternatives.

5.Improve understanding of assessment policy and its contribution to educational improvement.

Work on this objective, conducted principally in Programs One and Three, includes: analysis of the interplay between policy goals and assessment design, studies of alternative policy configurations, and formulation of principles that optimize policy goals.

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Criteria for Improved Educational Assessment

At the proposed work's core is an expanded set of criteria for judging the validity of educational assessment. These criteria, to be refined and modified through the course of the CRESST award, focus attention on the consequences and character of assessments as well as on more traditional technical and practical issues. Beyond traditional concerns with reliability and validity for specific purposes, the criteria include attention to:

- Assessment consequences
- Fairness
- Content quality
- Content coverage
- Cognitive complexity
- Meaningfulness
- Transfer and generalizability
- Cost and efficiency

The criteria serve as a focus for CRESST research and as new standards which others can use to evaluate their assessment alternatives. They also underscore our interest in improving the quality of current practice.

Overview of CRESST Research Programs

Program One: Building the Infrastructure for Improved Assessment

Program One seeks to assure that the R&D efforts of CRESST and of the many other players currently working on assessment reform will have optimal impact on educational policy and practice. To accomplish this goal, the program will: strengthen the network of those currently engaged in assessment initiatives, promote collaboration between R&D projects and those seeking to change assessment, and initiate strategies to promote change in assessment policies and practices. In close contact and collaboration with major players in the assessment arena, the program will also serve an important national agenda-setting function, helping to target precious R&D resources on areas to critical need.

Program Two: Designs for Learning-Based Assessments: Prototypes and Models

Program Two will create new prototypes for assessing student performance and new models for analyzing and validating assessment results. Requiring major rethinking of both traditional forms of testing and traditional psychometric theory, the prototypes will be built on new developments in cognitive and curriculum theory and on renewed understanding of the types of capabilities our nation and its citizens need for future productivity.

Program Three: Collaborative Development and Improvement of Assessments in Practice

Program Three also addresses the creation of alternative assessments. Here, however, the developmental work is conducted collaboratively with state and/or local constituencies, subject to their time and resource constraints and targeted to their goals and objectives. Beyond technical concerns with the nature of innovative student assessments, work in this program also seeks to understand the implementation and impact of new alternatives in policy and practice. What are the effects of various assessments and their combinations on students, teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers? How can assessments best be configured to meet multiple user needs? How can they best support learning and instructional improvement? Focusing particularly on serving low-income and disadvantaged students, the program will produce solutions to common technical problems, develop strategies for facilitating the implementation of improved assessment methods, and make recommendations for policy formulation.

Partners

The CRESST team is composed of researchers from the following institutions: UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation, the lead institution; University of Colorado; RAND Corporation; University of Chicago; University of California, Santa Barbara; University of Pittsburgh. In addition to the practitioner communities identified above, we have cooperative relationships with professional organizations, organizations of business and industry, the military, and individual consultants.

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